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Iranian English Majors' L2 Writing Self-efficacy: Exploring the Effects of Gender, Level of Education, and Teaching Experience

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Abstract

The current study explored the status quo of L2 writing self-efficacy among Iranian English majors in light of their gender, level of education, and teaching experience. To this end, 193 learners who were students or graduates of English literature or translation at BA, MA and PhD levels and who ranged in age between 19 to 40 participated in this study. Data were collected using the Second Language Writer Self-Efficacy Scale that measures L2 learners' linguistic self-efficacy, course performance self-efficacy, and self-regulation efficacy. Analysis of the data revealed no significant difference between males and females in terms of L2 writing self-efficacy. A significant difference was, however, found among all the three academic degree levels with the PhD group showing the highest level of L2 writing self-efficacy and the BA group showing the lowest self-efficacy. We set out to also examine whether experience in teaching English influences L2 writing efficacy. Our analyses revealed that the experienced teachers had a significantly higher L2 writing efficacy compared to the mid-experience teachers who were, in turn, less efficacious in L2 writing than low-experience participants. Implications of our findings for the writing courses and the what and how of writing instruction in the Iranian higher education curricula are discussed.

Keywords: L2 Writing; Education level; Teaching Experience; Writing Self-efficacy, Gender

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1. Introduction

L2 writing is thought of as a challenging ability to master as well as a demanding skill to teach. That is why many L2 learners, and even teachers, avoid writing by usually spending its share on other skills (Zabihi, 2018). Therefore, it is not uncommon to see L2 learners who are highly proficient in expressing themselves through speaking complaining that their writing ability lag much behind their spoken proficiency and that they feel not only inadequate in writing but also very slow in learning to write. While such incompetence can be, to some extent, overlooked in general domains of language use, it can hardly be ignored in academic settings where writing is a foundation stone (Golparvar & Khafi, 2021). University students are expected to perform various written tasks such as writing essays, reports, critiques, term projects, papers, theses and dissertations. The daunting nature of such tasks can look more challenging for L2 learners who are still grappling with writing in their own L1. This perceived incompetence intensifies the fear of failure in meeting the requirements of university courses and prevents EFL learners to make sufficient progress in learning to write. In other words, the fear of writing makes learners to avoid not only writing but also learning to write.

In fact, although L2 learners' actual ability in writing is a key determinant of success or failure in various domains of L2 use including the academic domain, learners' *perception* of their ability to write and to learn writing is also equally important. L2 writing self-efficacy (L2WSE) which refers to learners' judgements of their confidence that they possess the ability to write in a second language can, hence, contribute to higher quality writing as it results in deeper interest, more efforts and greater determination (Pajares & Valiante, 1999). This affective dimension of L2 writing becomes more crucial in contexts where demands are high and motivations are relatively inadequate, very much like the Iranian English education context.

In view of the significant role of L2WSE in a) EFL learners' actual writing ability, b) their abilities to meet the academic expectations of them which require writing and c) their motivation to pursue learning to write; and given that little research have explored L2 writing efficacy among Iranian English majors (Khojasteh et al., 2016; Khosravi, et al. 2017), this study set out to provide a picture of how self-efficacious Iranian university-level EFL learners are in writing in English as a foreign language

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(EFL) and how issues such as gender, level of academic education and the experience of teaching English can influence their L2WSE. In other words, this study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What is the status quo of L2WSE among Iranian English majors?
2. Is there any difference in L2WSE between male and female English majors?
3. Does academic degree/level of education affect Iranian English majors' L2WSE?
4. Does experience in teaching English affect Iranian English majors' L2WSE?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizations of writing self-efficacy

The concept self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs in their capabilities to perform specific tasks and is believed to have a key role in human functioning and achievements (Bandura, 1986; Graham 2007). The concept has been extensively explored in various domains of human behavior including education (Neroni et al., 2022), sports (Stephen et al., 2022), and workplace performance (Singh et al., 2019) among others. Within the domain of foreign language education, self-efficacy has been widely explored in the L2 teacher education literature and has been found to be of significance in various dimensions of teachers' well-being and efficiency (L. J. Zhang et al., 2023). Studies on EFL learners' efficacy in relation to different language skills are, however, comparatively limited with a few recent studies investigating self-efficacy in speaking (Zhang et al., 2020; Harris, 2022), listening (Harris, 2022), reading(Cho et al., 2021; Schunk, 2003) and writing (Golparvar & Khafi, 2021; Lee & Evans, 2019).

Writing self-efficacy which has been around since 1980s is conceptualized from three different perspectives. The first approach focuses on writing *skills* and defines writing self-efficacy as one's confidence in dealing with various skills and subskills one must possess to write. These may include dealing with grammar, composition, punctuation and organizing sentences (see McCarthy et al., 1985; Shell et al., 1995). The second approach conceptualizes writing self-efficacy as one's trust in his abilities to perform various kinds of written tasks such as writing a thesis, an application letter, or a fiction story

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(Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Shell et al., 1989). The third way is the composite approach which integrates the two previous approaches to better evaluate the multidimensional nature of writing self-efficacy (Pajares & Johnson, 1994).

Different scales have been developed in line with theoretical conceptualizations to measure writing self-efficacy. In one of the earliest studies on writing self-efficacy, Shell et al. (1989) used a measure which included both task and skill subscales. They found that while the skill component of the scale could significantly predict writing achievement, its task component could not, a finding which was later corroborated by Pajares and Johnson (1994), one of the most comprehensive writing self-efficacy research programs to date. One of the other widely used measures of writing self-efficacy was developed by Pajares and Valiante (1999). Measuring respondents' confidence in using grammar, usage, composition, and mechanical writing skills, this scale adopts a 0–100 response format rather than a traditional Likert type. In a later study, Pajares (2007) evaluated the validity of the scale using structural equation modeling and reported that writing skills self-efficacy should be divided into basic skills and composition skills.

In a more recent study, Bruning et al. (2013) criticized the previous conceptualizations of writing self-efficacy and proposed an alternative model which "separately highlights writing's cognitive and language-related aspects as well as its self-regulatory dimensions" (p.27). The scale which was validated in a sample of middle and high school students included 16 items divided into three subcomponents of ideation (i.e., generation of ideas), conventions (i.e., translating ideas into words) and self-regulation (management, monitoring, and evaluation of the writing process).

Although writing self-efficacy has a rich tradition of research in the past four decades, the majority of conceptualizations have been proposed with regard to L1 contexts. Only recently has a few studies attempted to provide a model of L2WSE. Teng et al. (2018), using a sample of 554 Chinese EFL learners, validated a model of L2WSE that included three dimensions of linguistic self-efficacy, performance self-efficacy, and self-regulatory self-efficacy. Linguistic self-efficacy refers to learners' judgement of their ability to perform lexical, syntactic, rhetorical, discourse and mechanical skills required to write. Self-regulatory efficacy examines learners' "metacognitive control with goal orientation in the learning-to-write process" (p. 933). Performance self-efficacy refers to "students' judgments of their capability to complete the course tasks or understand the course knowledge" (p. 933). Given the rise of interest in the concept of L2WSE, in a very recent study, J. Zhang et al. (2023) proposed

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a genre-informed four-factor model of L2WSE. The genre-based L2WSE scale included is very similar to Teng et al.'s model in its structure except that it includes a genre-based self-efficacy dimension which assesses respondents' familiarity with rhetorical structures such as writing narrative or argumentative essays. In this study we will use Teng et al.'s (2018) scale for its sound theoretical underpinnings, its focus on L2 context, and its higher psychometric properties.

2.2. Antecedents and outcomes of writing self-efficacy

Exploring the causes of success and failure in learning a foreign language is the essence of many studies withing foreign language education. While achieving competence in various domains of L2 proficiency seems to be an ultimate goal, the actual performance of language learners seems to be influenced by variables other than competence per se (Shirvan & Alamer, 2022). One of such variables is individuals' perceptions of their competence or what Bandura (1986) calls *self-efficacy* as he believes that how people evaluate their capabilities, that is their self-efficacy, is a better predictor of their performance than what they actually are capable of doing since it is such self-perceptions that determine what people do with the knowledge and skills they possess. Given such significance of self-efficacy, many studies have explored its antecedents and outcomes with education in general and foreign language teaching in particular.

To gain better insight of how language learners' perceptions of their writing abilities can be distinguished, many studies have explored the causes or antecedents of self-efficacy. Some researchers have investigated if writing self-efficacy varies across individuals' gender and have typically reported a higher writing self-efficacy for girls (Pajares & Valiante, 1997; 2001). There are also reports that the strength of association between writing self-efficacy and writing achievement is higher for female writers indicating that self-efficacy plays a more significant role in determining the final writing outcome for girls (Pajares & Valiante, 2001). Some studies have, however, found contrary results. Pajares and Johnson (1996), for example, reported that grade 9 boys showed a higher writing self-efficacy than girls while arguing that the higher writing self-efficacy of girls reported by other studies may be a function of grade level and will be neutralized or even reversed as they continue their studies in contexts that favor a masculine form of discourse (Cleary, 1996). In a meta-regression study of 76 published papers, Sun et al. (2021) examined the role of gender in L2WSE and found no mediating effect for gender in the

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relationship between efficacy and achievement. They argued that it is probably gender orientations, and not gender, that can influence this relationship.

Writing self-efficacy has also been found to be influenced by learners' grade/education level. Zhang and Guo (2012), for example, found that the relationship between writing self-efficacy and achievement were stronger in a sample of freshmen compared to sophomores. Cheung and Slavin's (2016), however, reported that primary and secondary students did not differ significantly in terms of writing self-efficacy. This is in contrast to Shell et al. (1995) who claimed that learners' self-efficacy increases as they move from primary to high school. More recently and with a focus on L2 contexts, Sun et al. (2021, p. 10) reported that "students' writing self-efficacy developed proportionately with the improvement of their writing skills and abilities across educational settings".

Aside from the antecedents of writing self-efficacy, another research stream has explored the influences of writing efficacy on various dimensions of the writing process. There is a bulk of research investigating the link between writing efficacy and writing performance in both L1 and L2 contexts, which have almost consistently revealed the positive influence of efficacy on writing (Bruning et al., 2013; Pajares et al., 1999; Sun et al., 2021). It has also been suggested that writing self-efficacy is positively related to general academic self-efficacy and goals for writing quality (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994), self-regulation efficacy (Pajares, 2003; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997), goals setting for writing (Pajares et al., 1999; Pajares, 2003), and interest in writing (Bruning et al., 2013). Writing self-efficacy has also been found to mediate the relationship between writing anxiety and performance such that anxiety-driven thoughts are found to reduce writers' efficacy which, in turn, negatively influences writing performance (Woodrow, 2011). The relationship between writing self-efficacy and the various dimensions of written texts has also been examined. Zabihi (2018) reported that self-efficacy can predict complexity, accuracy and fluency in L2 writing. In a more recent study, Golparvar and Khafi (2021) showed that linguistic, self-regulatory and performance self-efficacy, as operationalized by Teng et al. (2018), significantly affected Iranian English majors' summary writing performance.

Whereas the causes and outcomes of writing self-efficacy has been extensively explored in the past three decades, research on L2 writing efficacy is comparatively scarce. Within the domain of L2WSE, the Iranian EFL context in general and its English higher education system in particular is also underexplored. Gaining insight into the status of L2 writing-self efficacy among Iranian English majors is of significance since a) English programs are the only programs in the Iranian higher education where

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students are required to study in English and are expected to fulfil various writing tasks such as term projects, final exams and theses and dissertations, b)students and graduates of English-related majors comprise the majority of Iranian English teachers who are expected to teach writing which necessitates L2WSE as a minimum requirement. In this study, we therefore attempt to explore the status of L2 writing efficacy in this context.

3. The study

3.1. Context of the study

The context of this study is the English programs of Iranian higher education. While writing is one of the four major language skills and is supposedly the one which is of a more significant role in higher education, it has not received due attention in the Iranian education system in general and higher education in particular (Mirhosseini et al., 2022; Shirazizadeh et al., 2017). In the middle and secondary schools, writing is limited to phrase or sentence-level grammar exercises. At universities, English majors at the BA level have a number of writing-focused courses like paragraph writing, essay writing and letter writing which are meant to enable students write independently on a range of topics. At the masters' level, there is only one '*academic writing*' course that is focused on writing research papers and theses; there is no writing course at PhD level. Despite the few writing courses offered to English majors at universities, writing is clearly a Cinderella skill in the Iranian Education system. As Naghdipour (2016) concludes, Iranian EFL learners have unsatisfactory writing skills due to "the inadequacy of the English writing curriculum and pedagogy" (p.81). it is therefore not a surprise to see Iranian EFL learners at various levels of education and language proficiency complaining about their inadequate English writing ability and low confidence in this skill.

3.2. Participants

A total of 193 English major students participated in this study. In terms of language proficiency, they were all above intermediate level as they had at least two years of experience of studying English at university. Sixty four participants (33%) were males and 129 (66%) were females. They ranged in age between 19 to 40. At the time of the data collection, 105, 59 and 29 participants were BA (55%), MA (30%) and PhD (15%) students or graduates of English related majors at Iranian universities respectively.

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As to the experience of teaching English, 93 had no or less than one year of experience (i.e., low experience group), 50 had one to five years of experience (i.e., mid experience group) and 50 had more than five years of experience (i.e. high experience group).

3.3. Research Instrument

The Second Language Writer Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Teng et al. (2018) was used to explore L2WSE among Iranian English students. L2WSS was developed and evaluated through a series of rigorous validation procedures. It includes 20 questions rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me). This scale operationalizes L2WSE as a list of written statements, each presenting an assertion about learners' confidence in the learning-to-write and writing process. These 20 questions are categorized into three components namely linguistic knowledge (seven items), course performance self-efficacy (seven items) and self-regulation efficacy (six items). Construct validity of the three-component model of the questionnaire was checked and confirmed through structural equation modeling. As to the reliability of the scale, a composite reliability estimation procedure (test-retest & Cronbach's alpha) was adopted which showed that the reliability index for linguistic self-efficacy, self-regulatory efficacy and performance self-efficacy were 0.88, 0.87, and 0.89 respectively (Teng et al., 2018). In our study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability index for all the three components was 0.95.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

To collect the data, we distributed 261 questionnaires as hard copies or email attachments of which only 116 were fully completed and returned (44% response rate). We also sent the link of the electronic questionnaire to a four public Telegram groups of English students asking the members to cooperate. Seventy seven questionnaires were also completely filled by Telegram group members making the total number of completed questionnaires 193. The data were then fed into SPSS 26 and checked for reliability of the components and normality of the distribution. In the next phase of the data analysis, we employed T-test to investigate the difference between male and female participants and a series of ANOVAs to explore the effects of education level and teaching experience on L2WSE.

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4. Results

4.1. RQ1: What is the status quo of L2WSE among Iranian English majors?

The interviews were submitted to content analysis by two experts in the field. After checking coding consistency by the two coders, the cases of discrepancy were identified, discussed with the two coders and resolved. To find the answer to the first two research questions, which concerned the teachers' attitude to OCF and the factors they consider in allowing its use, the major themes and subthemes were extracted from the interview data by content analysis (see Table 1 for details). For the third research questions, which concerned the consistency between teachers' complications and research implications, the interview findings were juxtaposed with the research findings for comparison (see Table 2). The results revealed five major themes in relation to different dimensions of PCF from the teachers' perspective. The major themes concerned the issues touched upon in the literature such as learners' emotional reactions and the role of learners' proficiency level in the quality of PCF as well as issues that have not been considered in the literature. The major themes included teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of PCF, their concerns about learners' negative emotional response to PCF, the role of learners' age in being receptive to PCF, the role of learners' proficiency level in PCF effectiveness, and teachers' perception of their learners' preferences for and attitude toward PCF (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of L2WSE

	Min	Max	M	SD
Linguistic Knowledge	7.00	49.00	36.19	9.87
Self-Regulatory	6.00	42.00	31.16	7.81
Course Performance	7.00	49.00	34.30	9.73
Total L2WSE	20.00	140.00	101.68	26.12

To provide a picture of the status quo of L2WSE among Iranian English majors, we employed descriptive statistics for the whole data as well as the different sections of our data which represented our participants' demographic information. Our analysis showed that Iranian English majors' average L2WSE is 101 out of 140 which is tantamount to around 70 out of 100.

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As regards the three components of the L2WSS, the means were 36, 31 and 34 for linguistic knowledge, self-regulatory and course performance efficacy respectively. Normalization of these means to 100 revealed that our participants had the highest efficacy level in self-regulation (74%) and the lowest writing self-efficacy in course performance (70%).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of L2WSE across independent variables

		Gender		Education			Teaching Experience		
		Male	Female	BA	MA	PhD	Low	Mid	High
Linguistic Self-Efficacy	Mean	38.08	35.84	33.60	38.71	46.62	31.08	38.08	43.82
	SD	9.80	9.87	9.80	8.96	2.98	9.87	7.56	5.69
Self-Regulatory Efficacy	Mean	31.98	30.96	29.70	32.34	38.04	27.78	32.22	36.24
	SD	6.60	8.04	7.98	7.38	3.87	7.92	6.54	5.76
Performance Self-Efficacy	Mean	39.90	33.67	31.99	36.33	44.52	29.89	35.07	41.65
	SD	8.12	9.87	9.24	9.80	3.54	9.52	8.40	6.39
Total	Mean	110.96	100.47	95.29	107.38	129.18	88.75	105.37	121.71
	SD	24.52	27.78	27.02	26.14	10.39	27.31	22.5	17.84

To further investigate the status quo of L2WSE in the Iranian context, we calculated the mean of the L2 self-efficacy scores separately for males and females; BA, MA and PhD students and graduates; and participants with different levels of teaching experience. Our findings showed that male participants had a higher efficacy ($\bar{X}$=110) than females ($\bar{X}$=100) not only in total efficacy scores but also in all the three components of the scale. We also found that L2WSE increases in line with our participants level of education and teaching experience. The BA group reported the lowest efficacy ($\bar{X}$=95) and the MA group has a slightly higher score ($\bar{X}$=107). PhD students and graduated were found to be the most efficacious group in terms of L2 writing ($\bar{X}$=107). This pattern was observed in both total efficacy scores and all the component of the scale. Teaching experience was also found to be closely connected to L2 writing efficacy as efficacy scores increased from low ($\bar{X}$=88) to mid ($\bar{X}$=105) and from mid to high ($\bar{X}$=121) teaching experience group. Tables 1 and 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for our whole data and its different parts.

4.2. RQ2: Is there any difference in L2WSE between male and female English majors?

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In order to compare the data from male and female participants, four sets of independent samples t-tests were run. Our preliminary analysis showed that save for performance self-efficacy, Levene's test of equality of variance was not significant ($p > .05$) for the components of L2WSE. Therefore, the results for the course performance will be reported with the assumption of inequality of variance while for the three remaining tests, they will be reported here with the assumption of equality of variance in place.

Table 3
Independent Sample T-Tests: The Difference between Male and Female Participants' Writing Self-Efficacy

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Linguistic Self-efficacy	-1.12	191	.264	-2.27
Self-Regulatory Efficacy	-.63	191	.527	-1.02
Course Performance Efficacy	-2.40	41.96	.021	-4.12
Total	-1.39	191	.165	-7.42

As Table 3 shows that, with regards to the total writing self-efficacy, the scores of the two groups were not significantly different ($t_{(191)} = 1.39$, $p = .165 > .05$). Two of the components, namely linguistic knowledge ($t_{(191)} = 1.12$, $p = .264 > .05$) and self-regulatory efficacy ($t_{(191)} = .63$, $p = .527 > .05$), also showed non-significant difference between male and females. However, course performance self-efficacy was significantly different ($t_{(41.96)} = 2.4$, $p = .021 < .05$, Cohen's $d = .74$, representing medium effect size) between males and females, the male participants having higher values. In other words, males and females did not show any significant difference in terms of L2WSE and its components except for course performance where males outpaced female participants.

4.3. RQ3: Does academic level of education affect Iranian English majors' L2WSE?

In order to compare the writing self-efficacy of the participants across the educational degrees (i.e., BA, MA & PhD), four sets of one-way ANOVAs were performed. The findings showed that there was a significant difference ($F (2, 190) = 13.12$, $p = .000 < .05$) in the total writing self-efficacy across the three educational degrees. A significant difference also existed across the educational degrees for all the three components of the questionnaire, namely, linguistic knowledge ($F (2, 190) = 14.6$, $p = .000 < .05$), self-regulatory efficacy ($F (2, 190) = 7.72$, $p = .001 < .05$), and course performance self-efficacy ($F (2, 190)$

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= 12.46, p = .000 < .05). To locate the differences, a series of Tamhane's T2 post hoc tests, which are robust to inequality of variances were performed.

Table 4

Post hoc Comparison of Writing Self-Efficacy across Educational Degrees

Dependent Variable	(I) Degree	(J) Degree	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Linguistic	BA	MA	-5.14*	.001	-8.60	-1.67
		PhD	-13.06*	.000	-16.19	-9.92
	MA	PhD	-7.92*	.000	-11.36	-4.47
Regulatory	BA	MA	-2.60	.083	-5.45	.24
		PhD	-8.34*	.000	-11.81	-4.87
	MA	PhD	-5.74*	.001	-9.39	-2.08
Course	BA	MA	-4.30*	.013	-7.89	-.72
		PhD	-12.53*	.000	-15.92	-9.13
	MA	PhD	-8.22*	.000	-12.13	-4.31
Total	BA	MA	-12.05*	.006	-21.37	-2.73
		PhD	-33.93*	.000	-43.35	-24.52
	MA	PhD	-21.88*	.000	-32.2525	-11.51

As Table 4 demonstrates, for the total scores, the self-efficacy scores of the PhD group were significantly higher than those of M.A. (MD = 21.89, p = .000 < .05) and BA groups (MD = 33.94, p = .000 < .05). The M.A. group also had significantly higher writing self-efficacy compared to the BA group (MD = 12.05, p = .006 < .05). As for the three components of L2WSE, all pairwise comparisons were significant except for the difference in self-regulatory efficacy between the MA and BA groups (MD = 2.60, p = .083 > .05).

4.4. RQ4: Does experience in teaching English affect Iranian English majors' L2WSE?

To answer the last research question of this study, we compared the writing self-efficacy of the participants across the teaching experience. This is worth reiterating that we assigned English majors with less than one year of experience as low-experience group, those with 1 to five years of experience as mid-experience and those with more than 5 years of experience as high-experience group. To analyze the data, four sets of one-way ANOVAs were performed.

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The results showed a significant difference ($F_{(2, 190)} = 36.07$, $p = .000 < .05$) in the total writing self-efficacy across the three teaching experience groups. A significant difference also existed across the educational levels for all the three components of the questionnaire, namely, linguistic self-efficacy ($F_{(2, 190)} = 39.17$, $p = .000 < .05$), self-regulatory efficacy ($F_{(2, 190)} = 23.52$, $p = .000 < .05$), and course performance self-efficacy ($F_{(2, 190)} = 30.93$, $p = .000 < .05$). To locate the differences, a series of Tamhane's T2 post hoc tests, which are robust to inequality of variances, were performed.

Table 5

Post hoc Comparison of Writing Self-Efficacy across Teaching Experience

Dependent Variable	(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Linguistic	Low	Mid	-7.01*	.000	-10.60	-3.42
		High	-12.7*	.000	-15.88	-9.58
	Mid	High	-5.72*	.000	-8.98	-2.45
Regulatory	Low	Mid	-4.42*	.002	-7.43	-1.40
		High	-8.40*	.000	-11.21	-5.59
	Mid	High	-3.98*	.005	-6.99	-.96
Course	Low	Mid	-5.14*	.004	-8.89	-1.38
		High	-11.71*	.000	-14.96	-8.48
	Mid	High	-6.58*	.000	-10.21	-2.94
Total	Low	Mid	-16.57*	.000	-26.24	-6.91
		High	-32.85*	.000	-41.40	-24.31
	Mid	High	-16.28*	.000	-25.54	-7.01

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As shown in Table 5, for the total scores, the self-efficacy scores of the high-experience group were significantly higher than those of low experience group (MD = 32.85, $p = .000 < .05$) and mid-experience group (MD = 16.28, $p = .000 < .05$). The mid-experience group also had significantly higher writing self-efficacy compared to the low experience group (MD = 16.58, $p = .000 < .05$). As far as the three components of L2WSE are concerned, pair-wise comparisons revealed significant differences between all pairs and all the three components.

5. Discussion

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This study examined the status quo of L2WSE among Iranian English majors. We also investigated the effect of gender, level of education and teaching experience on our participants' L2WSE. Our findings showed that the participants felt most efficacious in self-regulation and least in course performance. Golparvar and Khafi (2021) also found that writing course performance is the that dimension of L2WSE in which Iranian students feel least efficacious. Self-regulatory efficacy in L2 writing refers to the metacognitive abilities of setting goals, planning and evaluation. On the other hand, course performance efficacy involves understanding the materials and handling the requirements of writing classes. Our participants' highest efficacy in self-regulation and lowest efficacy in course performance can speculatively reflect that English writing courses at Iranian higher education are not sufficiently effective in helping learners with L2 writing pushing students to invest more on individual learning endeavors. This may also be due to the nature of writing courses offered to English majors such that they require the students to handle most of the learning to write burden. Hosseini's (2018) findings also confirms that writing courses at Iranian universities fail to meet the theses writing needs of English students.

Analysis of our data also revealed that although male students outstripped females in L2WSE and all its three dimensions, only the difference in course performance was significant. While this result is in contrast to many studies that have found a higher writing self-efficacy for girls (Pajares & Valiante, 2001), it is also consistent with the findings of other studies Pajares and Johnson (1996). One reason for this inconsistency is that higher levels of writing self-efficacy in girls were usually found in samples of primary and early secondary students while male students at higher levels of education showed higher writing self-efficacy than females. Another significant argument for this finding can be proposed in relation to the Iranian education context and gender role stereotypes. In fact, as many scholars argue, such differences between girls and boys are rooted in the stereotypic beliefs students hold about their capacities rather than their biological sex (Harter et al., 1997; Matsui, 1994). It should also be added that the only significant difference between girls and boys were in course performance self-efficacy which, unlike the other two dimensions which are personal, is related to the social context of the classroom making the gender role justification of our findings more persuasive. One last justification for males' higher L2WSE can be traced to what Wigfield et al. (1996) refer to as the self-congratulatory behavior of boys in responding to such self-report instruments.

Comparison of the participants at various levels of education showed that L2WSE significantly increases from BA to MA and from MA to PhD groups. Previous studies have also shown that grade

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level can be a source of increase in writing self-efficacy (Shell et al., 1995; Cheung & Slavin, 2016). One possible explanation is that such an increase in L2WSE is due to students' higher mastery of L2 writing which is the outcome of longer exposure to L2 writing and more practice. One of the most important differences between BA and the other two groups is that students at graduate levels have the experience of writing a thesis which is their most serious experience with writing in English as a foreign language. Research also confirms that L2 writing competence is not only an outcome but also a source of self-efficacy (Sun et al., 2021). It should also be added that higher levels of education necessitate more extensive reading in English which also plays a key role in actual and perceived L2 writing competence (Schunk, 2003).

In this study, we also examined the influence of teaching experience on English majors' L2WSE which is an almost unexplored area of inquiry. Given that a large number of Iranian English majors are EFL teachers or are pursuing teaching jobs and are, thus, required to teach writing while they may not be prepared to write let alone teach it, exploring the L2WSE of these participants provides valuable insights into the status of both learning and teaching L2 writing in the English programs at Iranian universities. Analyses of our data reveled that teaching experience significantly affects L2WSE with more experienced teachers feeling more efficacious than their less experienced peers. Teaching experience has been found to be positively associated with teaching self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007), teacher's use of coping strategies (Chaaban & Du, 2017) and reflection (Soodmand Afshar & Farahani, 2017) among many other cognitive variables. The positive influence of teaching experience on L2WSE could, therefore, be mediated through such variables. For example, experienced teachers are found to be more reflective and better in using coping strategies; they may therefore use such attributes to find better solutions for their L2 writing inadequacies and impediments to their writing efficacy beliefs. Experienced teachers also have had more opportunities to attend workshops and on the job training courses which may have provided them with techniques to improve their L2 writing efficacy beliefs.

6. Conclusion

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This study explored the status quo of L2 writing efficacy among Iranian English majors. Our findings showed that, on average, our participants' L2 writing efficacy is around 70 out of 100. While it seems to be an acceptable score, it is far from ideal given that our sample was university students of English at various degree levels of whom many were teaching English, had passed various writing courses at the university, and had the experience of writing a thesis in English. It, therefore, seems that the role of writing in the English programs at Iranian universities need to be revisited to better help learners with L2 writing skill. Syllabuses and teaching methodologies can also be improved given that our participants felt least efficacious in course performance efficacy. A significant suggestion we can make based on our findings is for policy makers and higher education administrators to design and hold L2 writing literacy courses for teachers to help them not only with L2 writing but also with teaching it. Further research is, however, required to provide a more detailed understanding of L2 writing competence and efficacy in the Iranian higher education context. Issues like trajectories of writing and writing efficacy development, academic writing efficacy, challenges of teaching writing at universities and needs analysis studies are some dimensions which should be further explored by future researchers to find the shortcomings and offer more effective solutions.

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